

Message Text

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SUBJECT: EUROPEAN NATIONS SIGN ACCORDS ON DEVELOPING
BREEDER REACTORS

THE NEW YORK TIMES, JULY 6, 1977, CARRIED THE FOLLOWING
STORY:

EUROPEAN NATIONS SIGN ACCORDS ON DEVELOPING BREEDER REACTORS

PARIS, JULY 5 - FRANCE, WEST GERMANY AND SEVERAL OTHER
WESTERN EUROPEAN NATIONS TODAY SIGNED ACCORDS HERE FOR
FURTHER RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF NUCLEAR BREEDER REACTORS
AND THEIR EVENTUAL SALE ABROAD.

BOTH WESTERN EUROPEAN AND UNITED STATES OFFICIALS INTER-
PRETED THE AGREEMENTS AS A REJECTION OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S
CALL FOR AT LEAST A TEMPORARY MORATORIUM ON BREEDER DEVELOP-
MENT TO AVOID THE SPREAD OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS.

THE FUEL USED BY THE BREEDER REACTOR IS PLUTONIUM A MATERIAL
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THAT CAN ALSO BE USED FOR THE PRODUCTION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS.
THE BREEDER THEORETICALLY CREATES MORE PLUTONIUM THAN IT
BURNS, AND HAS THUS GATHERED SUPPORT AMONG GOVERNMENTS
WORRIED OVER THE POSSIBILITY OF A SHORTAGE OF URANIUM.

EARLIER THIS YEAR, PRESIDENT CARTER SAID HE OPPOSED THE USE
OF PLUTONIUM AS FUEL IN THE UNITED STATES. BUT LOBBYING BY

THE NUCLEAR POWER INDUSTRY HAS KEPT ALIVE THE POSSIBILITY THAT FUNDING FOR A DEMONSTRATION BREEDER IN CLINCH RIVER, TENN., MAY BE APPROVED BY CONGRESS.

DISPUTE WITH BONN AND PARIS RECALLED

THE UNITED STATES HAS ALREADY CLASHED WITH FRANCE AND WEST GERMANY OVER THEIR PLANS TO EXPORT URANIUM REPROCESSING EQUIPMENT. THE FRENCH HAVE HELD BACK ON A DEAL TO SUPPLY THE TECHNOLOGY TO PAKISTAN, AND ARE EXPECTED TO ANNOUNCE THIS DECISION PUBLICLY AFTER THE MILITARY COUP TODAY. THE WEST GERMANS HAVE REFUSED TO RESCIND COMMITMENTS TO SUPPLY BRAZIL WITH ENRICHMENT EQUIPMENT.

PRESIDENT CARTER'S OBJECTIONS TO THESE TWO DEALS WERE BASED ON THE FACT THAT REPROCESSING OF SPENT URANIUM FUEL PRODUCES PLUTONIUM, UNUSABLE AS A FUEL IN CONVENTIONAL REACTORS, BUT CAPABLE OF BEING DIVERTED FOR USE IN WEAPONS. THE OBJECTIONS TO BREEDERS ARE ESSENTIALLY THE SAME - THEY PRODUCE PLUTONIUM.

THE ACCORDS SIGNED TODAY ARE OF TWO KINDS. THE FIRST CALLS FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN FRANCE AND WEST GERMANY IN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT. THE OTHER ACCORDS CREATE A COMPANY, INCLUDING FRENCH, WEST GERMAN, DUTCH, BELGIAN AND ITALIAN INTERESTS, TO MARKET BREEDERS.

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A NUMBER OF PROTOTYPE BREEDERS ARE UNDER CONSTRUCTION OR IN OPERATION IN WESTERN EUROPE. FRANCE HAS A 250-MEGAWATT BREEDER THAT OPERATED FOR ABOUT 16 MONTHS, THEN CLOSED DOWN FOR A HALF A YEAR BECAUSE OF TECHNICAL PROBLEMS, AND RECENTLY RESUMED ITS OPERATION. THE FRENCH HAVE DECIDED TO MOVE AHEAD WITH A COMMERCIAL 1200-MEGAWATT BREEDER.

SOVIET NOT A PARTY TO ACCORDS

WEST GERMANY, TOGETHER WITH THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM, IS CONSTRUCTING A 600-MEGAWATT PROTOTYPE BREEDER. THE BRITISH HAVE TWO RESEARCH BREEDERS OPERATING IN SCOTLAND. THE SOVIET UNION, WHICH WAS NOT A PARTY TO TODAY'S ACCORDS, WAS A 350-MEGAWATT BREEDER THAT IS ALSO USED FOR DESALTING OF SEAWATER, AND IS BUILDING A 600-MEGAWATT REACTOR.

EUROPEANS TEND TO DEFEND BREEDERS FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

THERE ARE FEW SECURE SOURCES OF ENERGY FOR MOST WESTERN

EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, WHICH MUST IMPORT MOST OF THEIR OIL, COAL, GAS AND URANIUM. THE BREEDER REACTOR, BY PRODUCING MORE FUEL THAN IT CONSUMES, THUS BECOMES AN ATTRACTIVE SOURCE OF ENERGY.

A COROLLARY OF THIS ARGUMENT IS THAT THE UNITED STATES CAN AFFORD TO TAKE A STAND AGAINST THE POTENTIAL HAZARDS POSED BY BREEDERS BECAUSE IT HAS LARGE RESERVES OF COAL, URANIUM, OIL AND GAS, AND WHAT EUROPEANS VIEW AS A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH MIDDLE EAST OIL PRODUCERS, PARTICULARLY, THE SAUDIS.

ANOTHER ARGUMENT MADE IN FAVOR OF BREEDERS IS THAT WESTERN EUROPE HOLDS A TECHNOLOGICAL LEAD OVER THE UNITED STATES.
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OFFICIALS SAY THE AMERICANS WILL PROBABLY COME AROUND TO ACCEPTING THE INEVITABILITY OF BREEDERS AND EUROPE SHOULD BE PREPARED TO MEET ITS NEEDS AND SEIZE A SHARE OF THE EXPORT MARKET.

EUROPEANS DISCOUNT HAZARDS

EUROPEANS HAVE TENDED TO DISCOUNT THE POTENTIAL HAZARDS POSED BY THE CREATION OF LARGE AMOUNTS OF PLUTONIUM, AND HAVE SAID THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO CREATE STRICT SAFEGUARDS AGAINST ITS USE FOR WEAPONS.

WHILE THE EUROPEANS SEE POTENTIAL LONGRANGE ECONOMIC BENEFITS IN BREEDERS, THEIR CONSTRUCTION COSTS RUN INTO THE BILLIONS OF DOLLARS. IF THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIES CONTINUE TO SHOW SLUGGISH GROWTH, AN EXPENSIVE BREEDER PROGRAM COULD BE A PRIME CANDIDATE IN A BUDGET CUT.

DOMESTIC OPPOSITION TO NUCLEAR ENERGY GOT STARTED LATER IN MOST WESTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES THAN IN THE UNITED STATES, BUT IT HAS NOW BURGEONED INTO AN EFFECTIVE MOVEMENT AND BREEDER REACTORS ARE A LIKELY TARGET.

IN WEST GERMANY, LEGAL VICTORIES WON BY OPPONENTS HAVE SLOWED PLANS TO HAVE 30 NUCLEAR POWER REACTORS IN OPERATION BY 1985. IN FRANCE, OPPOSITION IS BEING MOUNTED AGAINST THE 1,200 MEGAWATT SUPERPHENIX BREEDER EVEN BEFORE THE START OF CONSTRUCTION. IN BRITAIN, BOTH ECONOMIC COSTS AND DOMESTIC PROTESTS HAVE LED TO PUBLIC DEBATE ON BREEDERS. PROTEST MOVEMENTS HAVE ALSO ADDED UNCERTAINTY IN THE NETHERLANDS, BELGIUM AND ITALY.

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